

THE MENACE OF BIGNESS

THE BUILDER has more than once joined with its contemporaries in raising a warning against the dizzy gyrations of the degree mill, for there is good reason to fear evil consequences from the flood of initiations that continues to pour over us. In order to envisage the rapid increase now upon the Craft turn to the experience of Illinois, in which great and prosperous commonwealth Freemasonry is growing far more rapidly than the traditional green bay tree. In 1890 there were 42,369 Masons in Illinois. By 1900 this had grown to 57,325, a net gain of only 14,966, or a few more than 1,400 members a year! By 1910 the figure reached 101,692, which was a very considerable army of Masons. But see what happened during the next decade! In 1920, a little over one year ago, Illinois Masonry numbered 203,447! This was a gain of 101,755, or more than 10,000 per year. But note what happened during the one year between 1920 and 1921: the number leaped to 230,588, which means a gain of 27,141. If the reader is good at mathematics he can work out the percentages for himself, though the figures are dizzy enough as they are.

Is such growth as this - it is quite representative - to be considered a good thing or an evil? It would appear - and this, as the diplomats would say, is the whole point of the present "convention" - that it may be either, and that it will become one or the other according to the effectualness of the initiation machinery, and all appertaining thereto. If lodge officials are so enamored of the lure of mere bigness as to open the gates to anything and everything that may chance along in the guise of petitioners, it is most certainly an evil, for the day in which Freemasonry becomes a huge, slovenly, member-chasing society will be the death day of all those qualities that have made it worth the time of genuine men.

But why may we not ask of ourselves that we become equal to the rapidity of this growth? The thing is not impossible. If the facilities are at hand, and if they be used by qualified men, it should be as easy to make good Masons out of one thousand candidates as it would be out of one hundred. Can this be gainsaid? If not, why not focus our attention upon making the organization safe for Masonry? that is, upon holding up the level of institutional efficiency to the demands made upon it. The Craft needs large numbers and great resources, because it has become one of our national institutions. In the days that are before it it will need greater resources still, for the mightiest of all its battles is rapidly preparing.

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